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TAGS: PREL PHUM MARR EU GG RS
SUBJECT: RUSSIA-GEORGIA: CALM BEFORE THE STORM?

REF: A. MOSCOW 1316 B. BRINK TBILISI E-MAIL

Classified By: PolMilCouns Alice G. Wells. Reason: 1.4 (b, d)

¶1. (C) Russian non-official commentators have shown little interest in reacting to the Georgian suit against Russia in the European Court for Human Rights. Even Sergey Markov -- usually the shrillest parrot of any line the Kremlin takes -- called for handling the matter between the foreign ministries of the two countries. "God forbid there should be any sort of 'war,'" he told the press; his statements were typical of the Moscow punditry.

¶2. (C) Officials, too, have backed away from the anger expressed privately by DFM Karasin (Ref. A); the irritated statement posted on the MFA website, which used harsh language to denounce the move as propaganda designed to attract support from anti-Russian powers; and the noxious depiction of Georgia and its government in the MFA's overview of foreign relations (septel). Andrey Kokoshin, chair of the Duma CIS Committee, regretted to the press on March 28 that this incident had occurred just as Russian-Georgian relations had started improving; he blamed Georgian politicians for currying favor with the EU rather than solving their problems with Russia. Kokoshin's deputy Andrey Savelev, while doubting the sincerity of the suit, reminded the public that "Russia suffered a perceptible loss of its own making when it tried to persecute immigrants from Georgia on specifically ethnic grounds." Even FM Lavrov, usually scathing, confined himself in answering a general question on Georgia in a public Q and A to the more-in-sorrow-than-anger reflection that the Georgian leadership does not reflect the attitudes of the Georgian people, and that the MFA will react without hysterics and not by calling names back.

Comment

¶3. (C) The GOR is probably holding off for two reasons. First, the anti-Georgian campaign that is the subject of the ECHR suit was unpopular among Russians and produced strong public protests; eventually Putin himself stopped the campaign, calling those carrying it out over-eager idiots. Second, the GOR may be keeping its powder dry to deal with a new threat: the April 5 release of findings of the UNOMIG-led Joint Fact Finding Mission pointing to Russian involvement in the March 11 attack in the Upper Kodori Gorge (Ref. B).

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